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1930
Housekeepers' Chat

Tuesday, October 7, 1930.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "The Story of Mrs. Petersen's Kitchen." With gratitude to Mary Rokahr, National Extension Economist in Home Management, who supplied this interesting story written by Mrs. Peter Petersen, of Sanford, Colorado.

Bulletin available: "Convenient Kitchens."

The other day I called on Mary Rokahr, National Extension Economist in Home Management.

"What have you to offer my radio audience, in the way of good information?" I asked.

"Let me think," said Miss Rokahr. "Are your listeners interested in kitchens?"

"Kitchens! I should say they are. Do you have something new on kitchens?"

"Not exactly new," said Miss Rokahr, "but I have a dandy story, which Miss Collopy, Home Management Specialist, gave me when I was out there this summer. The story is written by Mrs. Petersen, of Sanford, Colorado, about what she did to her kitchen in a county kitchen contest. Mrs. Petersen decided that convenient kitchens were not so much a matter of dollars and cents as of converting husbands. Before she could begin her kitchen improving, she had to break down the idols, customs, and sentiments of a generation. But let Mrs. Petersen tell her own story, in her own entertaining style."

Miss Rokahr gave me Mrs. Petersen's own story of her kitchen, and this morning I'm going to read it to you. You can pretend I'm Mrs. Petersen, instead of Aunt Sammy. Ready to listen? Mrs. Petersen speaking:

I came home from the Home Demonstration meeting with my head full of an idea, and my name on the dotted line. I had joined the Conejos County Kitchen Contest caravan. Just where I was going at that time, I hardly knew, but I was on my way.

How was I to break down the idols, customs, and sentiments of a generation? How was I to answer such problems as these -- Why should not a condition that had proven satisfactory for forty years be able to continue? Certainly a single color scheme, giving satisfaction for that length of time, should have become a masterpiece by now?

Should a deal old cupboard that had borne the weight of all the old gloves, shoes, pliers, traps, etc. not to mention the dust of week-to-week,

be cast aside for a built-in cabinet? Should the friendly corner be deprived of the ironing board after all these years? Should the breakfast-nook table be divorced from the overshoes, paper, and hats after so long a time of kindly nurture? Why, Oh Why, should the old chip basket in the corner be replaced by a built-in fuel box?

There, with many more of greater or less importance, are a sample of the problems confronting me in attempting to transform a dark brown kitchen, badly arranged, into a livable habitation.

Our contest problem -- "The most convenient at the least cost" began to offer difficulty also. If I made a convenient kitchen, I should have to make the kitchen over, tear out the plumbing, and reconstruct generally. I finally decided I should have to be content for the present with only a comparative degree of convenience.

As my procedure must be slow and tactful, I purchased my paint and paint brushes and began my job with such articles of furniture as could be removed from the room, away from the eyes of a curious and skeptical family. As the old kitchen chairs and table took on a new appearance, just so the ideas of the family, and by the time they had received two coats of pearl gray paint, with a top coat of enamel with some touches of rose, the breakfast-nook was transformed.

"I didn't believe it could be done," was the verdict of the onlookers.

The first shock was over. My star was in the ascendency. I began leisurely the painting of the woodwork in the pantry. By the time I had added the last touches of rose to the door knobs, hinges, shelf edges, and tin cans, I was a complete success, (at least, as a painter). I had been discovered. My daughter brought her school friends to see those pink knobs, and I even caught friend husband motioning a friendly neighbor to take a look at the pantry.

Having established myself somewhat in the confidence of my family, I proceeded with less reluctance. My chief difficulties lay not so much along line of idol-smashing as in attempting to prove to overworked carpenters, that I could make compartment divisions and lid racks as serviceable as they could, and in contriving to bring about more convenience in the arrangement of portable furnishings.

Regrouping and replacing of cooking utensils and other small utensils within easy reach of work tables, raising work tables to proper height, placing castors on small table to convey dishes to and from cabinet to sink, surfacing work table tops with linoleum, renovating old drapings, and arranging portable coal bin were among the problems solved in convenience into which cost entered but little.

Painting continued at odd times until the entire kitchen, pantry, and bathroom, with the exception of odd bits of furnishings, had taken on a new appearance.

The telephone had presented a problem and was finally given a couple of coats of gray enamel with a bit of gray trimming, thus placing it in

harmony with the other furnishings. But again the aesthetic sense of the family was disturbed. My daughter burst in from school, laughing and singing in real school girl fashion, almost frightened us with the suddenness of which she stopped as she came into the room.

"Why, Mother, what's the matter? Everything seems strange and different." Anticipating the cause I remained silent.

"Mother, you've painted the telephone? Will it talk? What do you think the company will say to that?" And she sank into her chair at the table with that reproachful stare which for the instant made me feel that I had committed the unpardonable.

After convincing themselves that the power of transmission was still active in the phone, the change was accepted and painting went on calmly until one day I suggested something needed to be done to the clock.

"Surely you wouldn't paint the clock?" burst from friend husband. Not daring to meet his gaze, I remained silent, but in my mind I said, "Verily this day another idol shall meet an ignominious death."

Gray and rose had become pretty much the rule in my kitchen by this time. An artist friend had suggested a third color, to break the monotony. Certainly a capital idea! But what was the third color to be? My eyes fell to my new linoleum -- rose and green -- Surely, green was my third color! So eager was I to try my new idea that I stopped in the middle of my morning dishwashing to administer the first coat of paint. It was an intense apple green. The result, in my own mind, was certain but I thought I should see the effect on other people. Friend husband was enthusiastic.

"That's great!"

Others called in, some were enthusiastic, some merely said, "Oh, you've painted your clock." The results were amusing. I would try another green. The results were similar and as I tried all the shades in catagory of green, my clock became the jest of the neighborhood. No friendly caller failed to ask, "Well, what color have you got your clock today?"

Having proven that green was not my third color I at last decided in a fury that the last act should be a deed of darkness and today its face shines through a coat of ebony, but from its heart it still sends out its "tick, tick, tock."

When our contest closed, I began to long for the year to pass that I might begin again on new kitchen problems next year.

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And that's all, of Mrs. Petersen's story of how she improved her kitchen, in spite of old traditions, in spite of her husband, in spite of her daughter and her friends. After hearing this jolly story, I think we'd all like to know Mrs. Peter Petersen of Sanford, Colorado. She has a delightful sense of humor, don't you think?

Mrs. Petersen says she used our kitchen bulletin this last year. No doubt there are many more ideas in it she will use when she begins improving things next year. And I hope she tells us what color the clock is painted next time.

Tomorrow: "Sleep and the School Child."

